

NEWARK BIOGRAPHY HENDERSON

SPEECH TO CITY COUNCIL

September 16, 1981

I oppose this ordinance which changes the name of Alling Street to Transit Plaza. The name Alling occupies a significant place in the commercial and industrial history of Newark. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, members of the Alling family, as craftsmen and businessmen, made important contributions to the commercial and industrial progress of the City of Newark. David Alling, the most clearly remembered, was a manufacturer of fine furniture, particularly what were then called "fancy chairs." Known for its excellence, his furniture was widely sold in the United States and in some European countries, notably France. Alling's home was on Broad Street near what is now Lafayette Street, his property extending eastward past Mulberry Street. His showroom was adjacent to his home; his workshop was in the vicinity of what is now Alling Street. Alling in woodworking ranks alongside of Boyden in leather and metal working as a symbol of Newark's industrial leadership.

I assume this change in name was proposed by N. J. Transit and, as a matter of course, approved and recommended by the City Engineer. There is doubt that anyone in the top echelon of N. J. Transit lives in Newark, knows much of, or is concerned about its history. The City Engineer lives in East Brunswick.

I doubt that anyone guiding N. J. Transit, Renaissance Newark, or anyone in this City administration, enjoyed Newark, as an adult, during the period from 1925 to 1940, when there was no need to mouth the phrase, "Great City of Newark." Its greatness was self-evident. You walked the streets at night, window-shopped at brilliantly lighted store fronts, and, if necessary, got a prescription filled at 2:00 A.M. at Petty's Drug Store, the only pharmacy in the metropolitan area open all night. A descendant of Alling was still in business in a lumbermill specializing in imported and native hardwoods at McCarter Highway and Clay Street, the firm of Bailey and Alling.

No renaissance will return those days. But, lacking the substance, we should, where possible, retain portions of the shadow. Alling Street remains a symbol of industrial leadership. Transit Plaza promotes the idea that Newark has become only a way-station, a stop-over for people going elsewhere. Little cobblestone Alling Street, 250 feet long, is in the midst of a cluster of dull, drab highrise rabbit warrens. Let it remain. People in transit might note the name, and surprised, might ask. If some planned change in configuration alters Alling Street as a thoroughfare, suggest to N. J. Transit that the area be called Alling Plaza, preserving the symbol. Transit Plaza would be an insult to the City of Newark.

D. J. Henderson